

Copyright

by

Ivan Walter Heyman

2010

**The Report Committee for Ivan Walter Heyman  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:**

**Melissus on Pain**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

---

Alexander P. D. Mourelatos

---

Stephen A. White

**Melissus on Pain**

**by**

**Ivan Walter Heyman, B.A.**

**Report**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December 2010**

## **Abstract**

### **Melissus on Pain**

Ivan Walter Heyman, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Alexander P. D. Mourelatos

In the fragments of Melissus we find the earliest metaphysical treatment of pain in the Western philosophical tradition. Famous for his one-entity ontology, Melissus argues that “what is” does not suffer pain or grief (B7.4–6). The scholarly literature on this passage has focused on two questions:

- (1) What is the argumentative structure of the passage?
- (2) Who, if anyone, might Melissus be responding to?

I will focus on question (1). First, I will provide an account of the argumentative strategy of the passage by viewing it in the wider context of B7 as a whole. I will then note how this strategy, as well as certain features of Melissus’ diction, suggest an initial account of the structure of the passage, according to which it contains three independent arguments. This structure will be confirmed as we delve into the details of the arguments themselves. One of these arguments will prove the most difficult to interpret, and I will

suggest two plausible interpretations of this argument, as well as two possible roles for the puzzling claim in 7.4 which invokes the notion of an “equal power” (*isēn dunamin*). Finally, we will see that one of the two readings of this claim has the accidental virtue of suggesting a response to question (2) above.

## Table of Contents

Melissus on Pain .....	1
Introduction.....	1
Melissus' Pain Vocabulary .....	1
An Overview of B7.....	3
The Pain Passage (7.4–6).....	8
Claims [4] through [7] .....	13
An Argument Against Any Pain ([4]–[5]).....	14
An Argument Against Any Transition to Pain ([6]–[7]) .....	15
An Argument Against Eternal Pain ([1]–[3]) .....	16
Two Options for Claim [3] .....	22
Alcmaeon and Empedocles.....	24
Conclusion .....	28
References.....	30
Vita .....	32

## Melissus on Pain

### INTRODUCTION

In the fragments of Melissus we find the earliest metaphysical treatment of pain in the Western philosophical tradition. Famous for his one-entity ontology, Melissus argues that “what is” does not suffer pain or grief (B7.4–6). The scholarly literature on this passage has focused on two questions:

- (1) What is the argumentative structure of the passage?
- (2) Who, if anyone, might Melissus be responding to?

I will focus on question (1). First, I will provide an account of the argumentative strategy of the passage by viewing it in the wider context of B7 as a whole. I will then note how this strategy, as well as certain features of Melissus’ diction, suggest an initial account of the structure of the passage, according to which it contains three independent arguments. This structure will be confirmed as we delve into the details of the arguments themselves. One of these arguments will prove the most difficult to interpret, and I will suggest two plausible interpretations of this argument, as well as two possible roles for the puzzling claim in 7.4 which invokes the notion of an “equal power” (*isēn dunamin*). Finally, we will see that one of the two readings of this claim has the accidental virtue of suggesting a response to question (2) above.

### MELISSUS’ PAIN VOCABULARY

Before delving into the text, a few comments should be made about three key terms we will meet in the pain passage. We do not find the familiar words for pleasure and pain that we encounter in later Greek philosophy, *hēdonē* and *lupē*. Instead, we find a

verb for suffering bodily pain (*algein*), another verb for suffering psychological pain (*aniasthai*),<sup>1</sup> and both of these are opposed not to what is pleasant but to what is healthy (*to hugies*).

While *algein* is typically translated as “to suffer pain” or “to be in pain,” Melissus’ contemporary Herodotus also uses it in the sense of “to be ill.”<sup>2</sup> This is significant, since Melissus contrasts what is *algeon* with what is *hugies*, which suggests that he may have sickness in mind as much as pain. For this reason I will often employ the disjunctive translation “to be sick or in pain” for *algein*. My intent here is to leave all the options open as we approach Melissus’ arguments.<sup>3</sup> Melissus’ other pain verb, *aniasthai*, is typically translated “to grieve” or “to be in anguish.” It refers to psychological rather than bodily pain. Thus, when Melissus denies that what-is suffers either *algein* or *aniasthai*, he is typically taken to be denying that what-is suffers either bodily pain or psychological pain. However, it could also be that Melissus uses *algein* to refer to being sick (or to having any pain-causing bodily condition); he could then, when he uses *aniasthai*, be referring to the associated painful sensation—the negative feelings which accompany sickness (or injury, etc.).<sup>4</sup> That Melissus finds it important to rule out both *algein* and *aniasthai* suggests that he is interested in ruling out both a bodily condition and a psychological condition. That he opposes both *algein* and *aniasthai* to health suggests that he takes *algein* and *aniasthai* to be unhealthy conditions of body and mind.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Guthrie (1965b, 133n1) for a brief discussion of these two terms.

<sup>2</sup> Herodotus, *Histories*, 4.68.

<sup>3</sup> That *hugiēs*, as we will see, has a wider semantic range than “healthy” prevents us from assuming that Melissus could *only* have sickness in mind.

<sup>4</sup> LSJ notes that *algein* can take a pain word in the dative, e.g., ἀλγήσας ὀδύνησι (*Il.*12.206), which suggests that the painful feeling itself is conceptually distinguishable from the *algein*. Cf. Vitali’s “soffrire” (*algein*) and “ammalarsi” (*aniasthai*).



This leads us to our last term, *hugiēs*, “healthy.” Like the Latin *sanus*, it is often translated “healthy,” though it has a wider semantic range than this English word. It is sometimes better translated as “sound” or “in good condition.” It can refer to both soundness of body and soundness of mind, which explains why Melissus finds it suitable to oppose it to both *algein* and *aniasthai*. It can also refer to the soundness of an inanimate thing, such as a drinking vessel, or an argument.<sup>5</sup> The etymology of *hugiēs* does, however, suggest that the application of the term to inanimate objects is derivative, and that the origins of the word involve the notion of being *alive* in a good manner.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, I will typically render *hugiēs* as “healthy,” although we should keep in mind that Melissus may have something more general or formal in mind. Finally, while I will refer to our key passage (7.4–6) as “the pain passage,” the possibilities just surveyed for the three key terms indicate that other descriptions of the passage might be equally appropriate, e.g., “the sickness passage,” “the health passage,” etc.

## AN OVERVIEW OF B7

The pain passage occurs about midway through B7. The fragment itself begins *in media res* (“Thus....”), and without a named subject. Following the traditional practice, we may suppose that the unnamed subject is “what-is” (*to eon*).<sup>7</sup> B7 opens:

(1) οὕτως οὖν αἰδιόν ἐστι καὶ ἄπειρον καὶ ἓν καὶ ὅμοιον πᾶν. (2) καὶ οὐτ' ἂν ἀπόλοιτο οὔτε μείζον γίνοιτο οὔτε μετακοσμέοιτο οὔτε ἀλγεῖ οὔτε ἀνιᾶται· εἰ γάρ τι τούτων πάσχοι, οὐκ ἂν ἔτι ἓν εἴη. εἰ γὰρ ἑτεροιοῦται, ἀνάγκη τὸ ἐὼν μὴ ὅμοιον

<sup>5</sup> LSJ, s.v.

<sup>6</sup> See Chantraine (1984, s.v.). I thank Alex Mourelatos for pointing out this etymology to me.

<sup>7</sup> The *to eon* designation appears several times in the fragments (7.2, 7.5, 8.6, 10), though never, it must be confessed, in such a way that guarantees that *to eon* is the grammatical subject at-large. Barnes (1982, 184) supposes that the subject of the discourse is *ho ti esti*, “whatever there is.” This phrase, however, only occurs in Melissus’ text if we adopt a conjectural emendation in B1 (see *ibid.*, 613n13).

εἶναι, ἀλλὰ ἀπόλλυσθαι τὸ πρόσθεν ἔόν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἔόν γίνεσθαι. εἰ τοίνυν τριχὶ μίῃ μυρίοις ἔτεσιν ἑτεροῖον γίνοιτο, ὀλεῖται πᾶν ἐν τῷ παντὶ χρόνῳ.<sup>8</sup>

(1) So in this way it is everlasting, unlimited, one, and all alike. (2) And it would not perish, nor would it become greater, nor would it be rearranged, nor does it suffer pain, nor does it suffer grief. For if it underwent any of these things it would no longer be one. For if it becomes different, it is necessary that what-is is not alike, but that what is earlier perishes and what is not comes to be. Again, if it were to become different by a single hair in ten thousand years, it will all perish in all of time.

The initial *houtōs* (“thus,” “in this way”) suggests that Melissus had already provided arguments to support his claim in the first sentence—the claim that what-is has the attributes of eternality, infinity, uniqueness, and homogeneity. Indeed, we do find arguments in other fragments for the eternality, infinity and uniqueness claims. What we lack is an argument for the homogeneity (*homoion pan*) claim. We do, however, get the essential outlines of such an argument in B7 itself.<sup>9</sup> In 7.2 Melissus lists several attributes that what-is lacks: perishing, becoming greater, changing arrangement, and undergoing pain and grief. He then claims that if what-is did suffer any of these attributes, it would no longer be one.<sup>10</sup> And he supports *this* claim by arguing that becoming different amounts to both: (a) lacking homogeneity, and (b) being a case of the “perishing” of a thing which was, and the “coming into being” of a thing which was not. It is not clear whether Melissus here regards the things that perish and come into being as the attributes themselves, or as the things having and lacking the attributes.<sup>11</sup> His argument against

---

<sup>8</sup> Here and elsewhere, I supply the Greek text as it appears in the *TLG*. I will note alternate readings when relevant.

<sup>9</sup> As Barnes (1982, 207–8) has noted.

<sup>10</sup> Solmsen (1969) is tempted to seclude this *hen*. But there is no manuscript support for this (as he is well aware). His main reason for seclusion seems to be based on his contention that Melissus would be “guilty of a serious inconsistency” (p. 8) if had written the *hen* here, since nowhere in the remainder of B7 does he substantiate his claim that the denied attributes result in plurality. But, as I will argue, Melissus contends that the attributes, insofar as they involve alteration, involve diachronic heterogeneity, which itself amounts to diachronic plurality. All he needs to show in the remainder of B7 is how having each of the attributes *does* involve alteration.

<sup>11</sup> Melissus, of course, has no word for “attribute”; he simply speaks of something’s “having” another thing. So, in 7.4, a pained thing does not “have” (*echei*) an equal *dunamis* with what is healthy. He speaks

rearrangement in 7.3 treats the arrangement itself—not the thing having the arrangement—as that which would perish or come to be. The final sentence of 7.2, however, suggests that he regards the thing having the feature as what perishes and comes to be: the slightest alteration (“by a single hair”) amounts to “all (of the thing) perishing” (*oleitai pan*).<sup>12</sup>

The solution I will adopt here is that Melissus is committed to both analyses. I read the initial analysis in 7.2 as an analysis in terms of features (*attribute analysis*): “if it becomes different, it is necessary that what-is is not alike, but that what was earlier perishes and what is not comes to be.” To say that it is “not alike” *because* an earlier thing perishes and a later thing comes to be requires that we regard the earlier and later things as distinct from but appropriately related to (i.e., features of)<sup>13</sup> the thing which is “not alike” in virtue of them.<sup>14</sup> When we do this, however, we regard the features as what come to be and perish.

Melissus then *extends* this *attribute analysis* in the next sentence, where he gives a bolder analysis in terms of the possessor of the attribute (*subject analysis*): “Further,<sup>15</sup> should it alter” (*ei toinun...heteroion ginoito*) in even the slightest way, “all of it will

---

in B2 of what-is not “having” (*echei*) a beginning or end; of two entities “having” (*echoi*) limits in B6; of what-is “having” (*echei*) nowhere to move to, because it is all full (B7); of common sense plural objects of sense perception “having” (*echonta*) forms and strength. Melissus himself treats both the things had and the things that have them as *onta*, and he subjects all *onta* to the same strict requirements. This is why we only get denials that what-is “has” some feature, or else “having” occurs in hypothetical (*reductio*) contexts. All of the positive attributes of what-is are expressed as predicate adjectives: what-is *is* eternal, *is* infinite, *is* one and *is* all alike. Saying that what-is *has* attributes reifies the attributes and risks implying that several *onta* exist—what-is and all its attributes.

<sup>12</sup> I read ὀλεῖται πᾶν with Diels-Kranz and Reale (as does Barnes). Vitali reads ἂν ὀλοῖτο πᾶν. There is also manuscript support for reading the πᾶν as τὸ πᾶν and as the subject of the previous clause, yielding: “Again, if the whole were to become different by a single hair in ten thousand years, it would perish in all time.” The point I make here stands in any case: the thing which *undergoes* the alteration is what is said to perish.

<sup>13</sup> Here and elsewhere, “features” is meant to include proper parts.

<sup>14</sup> The three distinct (i.e., non-identical) things are: (1) the “not alike” thing (τὸ ἐὸν μὴ ὁμοῖον), (2) the thing that perishes (ἀπόλλυσθαι τὸ πρόσθεν ἐόν), and (3) the thing that comes to be (τὸ...οὐκ ἐὸν γίνεσθαι).

<sup>15</sup> Barnes (1982, 616n20) claims that *toinun* in Melissus is not inferential.

perish” (*oleitai pan*).<sup>16</sup> What immediately concerns us here is Melissus’ claim that every alteration is a case of heterogeneity (a case of being “not alike”), and that this amounts to a case of pluralism. The pluralism and heterogeneity he has in mind have to be pluralism and heterogeneity over time: before the alteration (cf. *heteroioutai*, 7.2), there is something (i.e., *to prosthē eon*, 7.2) which there no longer is after the alteration; conversely, there is something after the alteration which did not exist beforehand (*to de ouk eon*, 7.2). The plurality and heterogeneity can be seen as such only when both times (the before and the after) are in view. I will refer to this as *diachronic heterogeneity* and *diachronic pluralism*.

*Diachronic heterogeneity*

Something *X* is diachronically heterogeneous iff given two distinct times,  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , *X* has at least one feature at  $t_1$  that *X* does not have at  $t_2$ , and *X* has at least one feature at  $t_2$  that *X* does not have at  $t_1$ .<sup>17</sup>

*Diachronic plurality*

Some state of affairs *Y* is diachronically plural iff given two distinct times,  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , there is something which exists (or is the case) at  $t_1$  that does not exist (or is not the case) at  $t_2$ , and there is something which exists (or is the case) at  $t_2$  that does not exist (or is not the case) at  $t_1$ .

Melissus thinks that every case of diachronic heterogeneity is a case of diachronic plurality. Consider an example. If a soccer ball is inflated at  $t_1$  but not at  $t_2$ , it is diachronically heterogeneous, since it has a feature at  $t_1$  (inflatedness) that it lacks at  $t_2$ , and it lacks a feature at  $t_1$  (uninflatedness) that it has at  $t_2$ . Melissus regards this as a case

---

<sup>16</sup> What Melissus then tacks on, “in all of time” (*en tōi panti chronōi*) is puzzling. The phrase itself is common enough, but what does *perishing* in all of time mean? Can he really be saying that the perishing happens over and over again, at every moment? (For this suggestion, see Barnes [1982, 616n20].) But why does he think that? Perhaps instead we can construe the sense as “from all of time,” where the point would be that alteration amounts to the thing perishing without a trace, i.e., it never *really* existed, not even in past time. So to be a *to eon* merely in the past, is to fail to be a true *to eon* (cf. τοῦ...ἔόντος ἀληθινοῦ, B8.5).

<sup>17</sup> Melissus’ analysis involves four feature-terms: both the feature had at  $t_1$  and the feature lacked at  $t_1$ , as well as the feature lacked at  $t_2$  and the feature had at  $t_2$ : the change from hot to cold is thus a dual perishing–coming-to-be: the hot (*eon* at  $t_1$ ) *perishes* (i.e., *ouk eon* at  $t_2$ ), and the cold (*ouk eon* at  $t_1$ ) *comes to be* (i.e., *eon* at  $t_2$ ). This is why he will claim that pluralism results: one thing *eon* at  $t_1$ ; a different thing *eon* at  $t_2$ .

of diachronic plurality, because he regards the inflatedness at  $t_1$  as something which is the case at  $t_1$  but is not the case at  $t_2$ , *and* he regards the uninflatedness at  $t_2$  as something which is not the case at  $t_1$  but is the case at  $t_2$ .

Melissus claims in 7.1 that what-is is “all alike” (*homoion pan*). The “all” here is probably meant to rule out both diachronic heterogeneity (i.e., not all of the “temporal parts” are alike) as well as what we might call *synchronic heterogeneity* (i.e., not all of the “spatial parts” are alike at any given time  $t$ ).<sup>18</sup> The soccer ball would be *synchronically heterogeneous* at  $t_1$  insofar as it has both black parts and white parts at  $t_1$ . Melissus would also probably think that this synchronic heterogeneity at  $t_1$  constitutes *synchronic plurality* at  $t_1$ .<sup>19</sup>

In 7.2 Melissus claims that if what-is were to “suffer” (*paschoi*) pain or grief (or rearrangement or perishing or enlargement), it would no longer be one. He then sketches an argument, as we have seen, to show that diachronic heterogeneity (which he presumably takes all cases of having these attributes to involve) entails diachronic plurality. But this argument will only rule out two types of cases. Taking the attribute of pain, the argument will show that the following two cases of pain amount to diachronic pluralism: (1) the case in which something goes from being unpained at  $t_1$  to being pained at  $t_2$ , and (2) the case in which something goes from being pained at  $t_1$  to being unpained at  $t_2$ . We will have to turn to the pain passage itself to see if Melissus offers any additional arguments to rule out cases of pain that do not involve diachronic heterogeneity: for instance, a case in which something always was and always will be in pain.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> For further discussion, see below, note 48.

<sup>19</sup> The *MXG* provides a general argument that suffices to show that heterogeneity of either sort constitutes pluralism of some sort (974a12–14; cf. Barnes [1982, 208]).

<sup>20</sup> I will forgo a discussion of 7.7–10, which treats the topic of void. It bears no logical connection to the preceding sections of the fragment, by which I mean that none of its arguments rely on (or make any reference to) any of the positive attributes affirmed in 7.1 or any of the denied attributes in 7.2, or to any of

## THE PAIN PASSAGE (7.4–6)

It is time to see how Melissus directly argues that what-is is free of pain or sickness and grief:

(4) οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἴη ἀλγέον· οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναίτο ἀεὶ εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον· οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ· οὐδ' ἂν ὁμοῖον εἴη, εἰ ἀλγέοι· ἀπογινομένου γὰρ τευ ἂν ἀλγέοι ἢ προσγινομένου, οὐκ ἂν ἔτι ὁμοῖον εἴη. (5) οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ὑγιὲς ἀλγῆσαι δύναίτο· ἀπὸ γὰρ ἂν ὅλοιτο τὸ ὑγιὲς καὶ τὸ ἐόν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐὼν γένοιτο. (6) καὶ περὶ τοῦ ἀνιάσθαι αὐτὸς λόγος τῷ ἀλγέοντι.

(4) Nor does it suffer pain. For it would not be “all,”<sup>21</sup> were it in pain. For a thing in pain would not be able to always be. Nor has it equal power with what is healthy. Nor would it be the same, if it were in pain. For it would be in pain when something was taken away or added to it, and hence it would no longer be the same. (5) Nor could what is healthy suffer pain. For what is healthy, i.e., what is, would perish, and what is not would come to be. (6) And concerning suffering anguish, the argument is the same as for suffering pain.

We may label the individual claims as follows (ignoring for now the underlining):

*Thesis:* What-is does not suffer pain.  
οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ.

- [1] For it would not be “all,” were it in pain.  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἴη ἀλγέον·
- [2] For a thing in pain would not be able to always be.  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναίτο ἀεὶ εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον·
- [3] Nor has it equal power with what is healthy.  
οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ·
- [4] Nor would it be the same, if it were in pain.  
οὐδ' ἂν ὁμοῖον εἴη, εἰ ἀλγέοι·

---

the additional facts deduced in any of the arguments in 7.2–6. In contrast, the arguments of 7.2–6 take each item in the 7.2 list in turn, and frequently make reference to positive attributes in 7.1. Thus, 7.1–6 and 7.7–10 are logically independent. Indeed, Solmsen (1969, 228–9) suggests that 7.1–6 and 7.7–10 may be separate fragments. However, it is worth noting that there may be a thematic connection between the 7.7–10 discussion of “emptiness” or “void” (*keneon*) and the 7.4–6 discussion of sickness and pain, since the latter phenomena were commonly explained in terms of an “emptying” (*kenōsis*). See, e.g., *De Nat. Hom.* 4. I thank Steve White for pointing out this thematic connection.

<sup>21</sup> I will discuss possible translations and interpretations of this *pan* below.

- [5] For it would be in pain when something was taken away or added to it, and hence it would no longer be the same.  
ἀπογινομένου γάρ τευ ἂν ἀλγέοι ἢ προσγινομένου, οὐκ ἂν ἔτι ὁμοῖον εἴη.
- [6] Nor could what is healthy suffer pain.  
οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ὑγιὲς ἀλγῆσαι δύναιτο·
- [7] For what is healthy, i.e., what is, would perish, and what is not would come to be.  
ἀπὸ γὰρ ἂν ὅλοιτο τὸ ὑγιὲς καὶ τὸ ἐόν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐὼν γένοιτο.<sup>22</sup>

While the precise role that each of these claims plays in the argument is not initially clear, we can discern the overall strategy of the argument. Claims [4] through [7] remind us of the argument sketched in 7.2, since they focus on showing that suffering pain involves heterogeneity, perishing and coming-to-be. Thus, as arguments against pain, they will ultimately depend upon Melissus' ability to substantiate his claim in 7.1 that what-is is “all alike” or “homogeneous” (*homoion pan*),<sup>23</sup> as well as his arguments against coming-to-be and perishing in B1 and B2. Claims [1] through [3], however, are less clear. *Prima facie*, they do not involve homogeneity. Claim [1] mentions the puzzling notion of “being all.” Could this relate to being “all alike” (*homoion pan*, 7.1)? Claim [2] mentions the temporal qualifier “always” (*aei*). Is this synonymous with the attribute of being “eternal” (*aidios*) affirmed in 7.1? Finally, claim [3] does not reference any familiar attributes. I will discuss claims [1] through [3] in detail in a subsequent section.

---

<sup>22</sup> I set aside, for now, Melissus' claim in 7.6 that “the same argument” (ὁ αὐτὸς λόγος), i.e., claims [1] through [7], also rule out grief. We must suppose that he thinks merely substituting every occurrence of any form of *algein* with the corresponding form of *aniasthai* will yield a sound argument.

<sup>23</sup> 7.2 suggests that Melissus deduces *homoion pan* from *hen*, though the argument there could only yield diachronic homogeneity. The *MXG* provides the general argument (see my note 19).

With the overall strategy in view, we can now attempt to discern more precisely the inferential structure of the passage. The following structure, I will now argue, is suggested by features of Melissus' diction (ignoring for now the underlining):<sup>24</sup>

*Thesis:* What-is does not suffer pain.  
οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ.

- [1]     For it would not be “all,” were it in pain.  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἴη ἀλγέον·
  
- [2]     For a thing in pain would not be able to always be.  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναιτο ἀεὶ εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον·
  
- [3]     Nor has it equal power with what is healthy.  
οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ·
  
- [4]     Nor would it be the same, if it were in pain.  
οὐδ' ἂν ὁμοῖον εἴη, εἰ ἀλγέοι·
  
- [5]     For it would be in pain when something was taken away or added to it, and hence it would no longer be the same.  
ἀπογινομένου γὰρ τευ ἂν ἀλγέοι ἢ προσγινομένου, οὐκ ἂν ἔτι ὁμοῖον εἴη.
  
- [6]     Nor would what is healthy be able to suffer pain.  
οὐδ' ἂν τὸ ὑγιὲς ἀλγῆσαι δύναιτο·
  
- [7]     For what is healthy, i.e., what is, would perish, and what is not would come to be.  
ἀπὸ γὰρ ἂν ὄλοιτο τὸ ὑγιὲς καὶ τὸ ἐόν, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἐὼν γένοιτο.

Certain textual details confirm this view of the passage's structure. First, if we note the placement of the confirmatory γὰρ particles (“for”), we see that [1] is directly subordinate to what precedes it (i.e., the *Thesis* to be proved). Likewise, [2] is subordinate to [1]; [5] is subordinate to [4]; and [7] is subordinate to [6]. This suggests that the argumentative role played by each of [1], [2], [5], and [7] is to support or offer a

---

<sup>24</sup> With the exception of claim [3], this is also how Barnes (1982, 217), though hesitantly, views the structure of the passage, as does Merrill (1998, 393–6). I here detail textual evidence to confirm Barnes' suggestion.



reason to believe the immediately preceding clause.<sup>25</sup> But the inferential particles can tell us nothing about the positions or roles of claims [3], [4], and [6]. Other features of diction, however, do help. Let us deal with [4] and [6] first, as they pose fewer challenges than [3].

There is some indication that both [4] and [6] are not subordinate to what precedes them. Each begins with the coordinating conjunction οὐδέ; and this suggests that they are coordinate with something that precedes them. However, other details suggest that they are coordinate not with what immediately precedes them, but rather with [1].

Beginning first with [4], one clue here is the protasis of the conditional: “if it were in pain” (*ei algeoi*). What is the antecedent of the “it” supplied in the English translation? The apodosis of [4] also lacks an expressed subject, so we must look outside of [4] for this antecedent. Turning to [3], we find that [3] also lacks an expressed subject. It, like [4], only has a supplied English “it.” However, if we can find the antecedent of [3]’s “it,” we also will have found the antecedent of [4]’s “it.” Turning to [2], we do find at last a subject expression, “a thing in pain” (*chrēma algeon*). And this seems a likely candidate for the antecedent of [3]’s “it,” since it is the nearest expressed subject and supplying it in [3] yields a suitable thought: “nor would a thing in pain have equal power with what is healthy.” So, given that the unnamed subject of [3] is *chrēma algeon*, can this unnamed subject also serve as the unnamed subject of [4]? It would seem not. For if it did, [4] would be claiming that “nor would a thing in pain be homogeneous, if it were in pain”—where the protasis is now redundant. So, the unnamed subject of [4] must be different than what is both the unnamed subject of [3] and the named subject of [2]. This forces us to [1]. While [1] lacks a named subject, it is fairly clear that it must be the same as the

---

<sup>25</sup> Denniston (1950, 58–68) notes that *gar* may confirm or explain something further back than the immediately preceding clause, though he regards such cases as non-standard.

subject of the *Thesis* itself, which [1] supports. And the *Thesis*' subject is the implicit subject of the fragment as a whole, i.e., *to eon*.<sup>26</sup> Further, [4] makes perfect sense with *to eon* as its subject: "nor would what-is be homogeneous, if it were in pain." The protasis ("if it were in pain") is no longer useless. And the apodosis ("nor would what-is be homogeneous") is just the sort of claim that Melissus should be interested in establishing, since, as I noted above, he has already signaled in 7.2 that suffering sickness or pain involves being diachronically heterogeneous, which amounts to lacking homogeneity—and lacking homogeneity is now asserted of what-is in the apodosis of [4]. What all this amounts to is that [4], like [1]—and unlike [3] and [2]—has the same subject as the *Thesis* itself. This may be taken as *prima facie* evidence that [4], unlike [3] and [2] is coordinate to [1].

We can now turn to claim [6]. One clue here is in the expressed subject, "what is healthy" (*to hugies*). In contrast to [6], neither of the two claims which immediately precedes (i.e., neither [5] nor [4]) has a named subject. As we have just seen, the unnamed subject of [4] is *to eon*. And since [5] is subordinate to [4], its unnamed subject must be assumed to be the same, i.e., *to eon*. This tells us that [6] has a named subject which is different from the unnamed subject of both [5] and [4]. Nor is there any mention in either [5] or [4] of "health" or anything else that might obviously prompt [6]'s turning to the topic of "what is healthy" if [6] were subordinate to either of them. (The only such precedent is the *tōi hugiei* in [3], but we have already had reason to think that [4] was neither subordinate to nor coordinate with [3].) Given the absence of other options, this counts in favor of treating [6] as coordinate with [1] and [4]. Looking more closely at the content will only confirm this initial characterization of the passage's structure.

---

<sup>26</sup> The subject is never clearly expressed in the fragment (see my note 7).

## CLAIMS [4] THROUGH [7]

In 7.2 we are given a list of five denied attributes, one of which is “growth” or “becoming larger” (μᾶλλον γίνοιτο). This, like all the other attributes denied in 7.2, is treated there by Melissus as a case of alteration, which amounts to diachronic heterogeneity. Furthermore, Melissus later glosses the “becoming larger” attribute as something’s “being added” (προσγίνεται, 7.3) to a thing.<sup>27</sup> And this is the same notion we find in [5], “something being added” (τεν...προσγινομένου, 7.4). This suggests that in [4] and [5] Melissus is arguing that suffering pain can be ruled out insofar as it is occasioned by the sufferer’s “becoming larger,” i.e., “having something added”—since this, as a form of alteration, amounts to diachronic heterogeneity and thereby diachronic plurality.

What about cases in which suffering pain is occasioned not by “becoming larger” but by “becoming smaller,” i.e., “having something taken away” (ἀπογινομένου...τεν, [5])? There is reason to think that Melissus conceives of subtraction or becoming smaller as a case of partial perishing. That he regards perishing as conceptually admitting of degrees is suggested when, in 7.2, he refers to “all (of something) perishing” (ὀλεῖται πᾶν).<sup>28</sup> Further, it has been proposed by Covotti that “nor would it perish” (*out’ an apoloito*) in the list of denied attributes in 7.2 be read instead as “nor would it lose anything” (*out’ an apoluo ti*).<sup>29</sup> This preserves a nicer parallel between the first two attributes, which Melissus treats as a pair. We must assume that he treats them as a pair because we must assume that he rules them both out at one and the same time in 7.2,<sup>30</sup> since he moves on in 7.3 to rearrangement. Where in 7.2 does he do this? In the argument

---

<sup>27</sup> While the reasoning in 7.3 is difficult to make out, the μήτε προσγίνεται μηδὲν μήτε ἀπόλλυται does seem to recapitulate 7.2’s οὐτ’ ἂν ἀπόλοιτο οὐτε μᾶλλον γίνοιτο.

<sup>28</sup> This point depends upon reading the πᾶν with ὀλεῖται (or with ἂν ὀλοιτο) rather than with the previous verb, γίνοιτο. See my note 12.

<sup>29</sup> See Barnes (1982, 615–16n16).

<sup>30</sup> Compare this to his treatment of *algein* and *aniasthai*, the last two attributes in the list: they also get treated as a pair, sharing all the arguments in 7.4–6.

from alteration to diachronic plurality, he claims that were alteration to occur, some attribute would “perish” (*apollusthai*, 7.2) and another would “come to be” (*ginesthai*, 7.2). To lose an attribute just is “to have something taken away,” and to gain a new attribute just is “to have something added.” And this, Melissus insists, is nothing but a case of perishing and coming-to-be.

Returning to claims [4] through [7] of the pain passage: If Melissus has already shown that addition and subtraction amount to coming-to-be and perishing in 7.2, why do we get what appear to be two arguments against pain, one on the basis that it amounts to addition and subtraction ([4]–[5]), and another on the basis that it amounts to coming-to-be and perishing ([6]–[7])?<sup>31</sup> Perhaps Melissus finds it worthwhile to present both arguments because they appeal to different sorts of considerations, or rule out different cases of pain.

#### **AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ANY PAIN ([4]–[5])**

The first argument assumes an empirical generalization to the effect that for all  $X$ , if  $X$  is suffering  $P$  (pain or sickness) at  $t_1$ , then there is a  $Y$  such that  $Y$  is identical neither to  $X$  nor to  $P$ , and  $Y$  is being either added to  $X$  at  $t_1$  or taken from  $X$  at  $t_1$ .<sup>32</sup> The  $Y$  here is the “something” (*teu*) Melissus refers to. Melissus expects his audience to find it plausible that every case of occurrent pain or sickness is attended by an occurrent addition or subtraction of *something*—though this something is distinct from the pain itself. If it were the pain itself, then in a case of subtraction, the suffering of pain would be occasioned by the subtraction of that pain—a result which is presumably problematic in cases in which the pain lasts longer than one moment. Rather, Melissus’ opponents

---

<sup>31</sup> I am unable to discern a way to construe these four claims as one argument.

<sup>32</sup> When I say that  $Y$  cannot be identical to  $X$  or to  $P$ , this is meant to leave open the possibility that  $Y$  is identical to some part of  $X$  or some part of  $P$ . The former would be appealing in subtraction cases.

will suppose that something else, something with a peculiar *dunamis* [3] and *eidos* (B8)—perhaps “the hot,” “the wet,” or “the bitter”—is what is being added or subtracted while sickness or pain is experienced. Melissus himself will not care what thing his opponent will suppose is added or subtracted. No matter what it is, the addition or subtraction at  $t_1$  that necessarily accompanies every experience of pain or sickness at  $t_1$  will be seen to entail a case of diachronic heterogeneity (from the time before the addition or subtraction, i.e.,  $t_0$ , to the time of the addition or subtraction, i.e.,  $t_1$ ) and thus diachronic plurality (from  $t_0$  to  $t_1$ ).<sup>33</sup> The argument is not restricted to the case of a healthy thing becoming sick: a thing experiencing pain at time  $t_1$  also could have experienced pain at time  $t_0$ , at time  $t_{-1}$ ,  $t_{-2}$ , etc., as well as at time  $t_2$ ,  $t_3$ , etc. At every such time, however “something” is added or subtracted.

#### AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ANY TRANSITION TO PAIN ([6]–[7])

Melissus offers a different argument against pain in [6]–[7]. This one does not rely upon popular physiological theories. Nor does it attempt to rule out any occurrence at any time of pain or sickness. It argues instead against the possibility of something healthy becoming sick. It relies only upon Melissus’ contention that the alteration involved would involve the perishing of something (what is healthy) and the coming to be of something else (what is sick). While this would count as a case of diachronic

---

<sup>33</sup> It might be thought that Melissus’ claim that the thing suffering the pain is “no longer” homogeneous suggests that he has *synchronic heterogeneity* in mind (i.e., the thing used to be synchronically homogeneous but it no longer is). This does not work in cases of subtraction, however. If the thing suffering pain is synchronically homogeneous at  $t_0$  (before the subtraction), the only things which could be subtracted from it are themselves synchronically homogeneous. So at  $t_1$ , even though we have a case of diachronic heterogeneity (the thing’s size differs from  $t_0$  to  $t_1$ ), there is no case of synchronic heterogeneity at  $t_1$ : the thing subtracted is synchronically homogeneous at  $t_1$ , and the thing it was subtracted from is also synchronically homogeneous at  $t_1$ . Thus, rather than taking Melissus’ “no longer” to signal synchronic heterogeneity, I suggest the following account: the thing, even if it were diachronically homogeneous across all times  $t_0$  and before, is now at  $t_1$  “no longer” diachronically homogeneous across times  $t_1$  and before.

plurality, Melissus does not describe it as a case of alteration or heterogeneity.<sup>34</sup> He seems to want us to view it as a simple case of “coming-to-be”—which is the first attribute of what-is to be ruled out (B1), and this on the firm footing of the *ex nihilo nihil* principle (οὐδαμὰ ἂν γένοιτο οὐδὲν ἐκ μηδενός, B1). Thus, Melissus, in his final argument against sickness and pain, refers us back to basic Eleatic principles. While this argument may claim a “purer” source of justification than the previous one (which relies on a popular physiological view), it has a narrower scope: it only speaks to cases in which a thing is healthy at  $t_0$  and in pain at  $t_1$  (or vice versa)—whereas the physiological argument can handle cases in which a thing is in pain at  $t_0$  and in pain at  $t_1$ . Of course, the physiological argument may be based upon a false view: it may be empirically false that every instance of pain is accompanied by the addition or subtraction of something.

#### AN ARGUMENT AGAINST ETERNAL PAIN ([1]–[3])

It is now time to return to the first three claims of the pain passage. We have already noted that [2] supports [1], and that [3] relies upon [2] for its subject, i.e., *chrēma algeon*. We must now take a closer look at the content of the claims.

Melissus has already argued in B1 and B2 that what-is “always was” (*aei ēn*) and “always will be” (*aei estai*)—i.e., that what-is is “eternal” (*aidion*), as he puts it in 7.1. Granting him this, should he now establish that being in pain somehow entails that the thing which is in pain is temporally bounded, then he will have established that what-is cannot be in pain, *insofar as what-is is eternal*. Like the argument given in claims [6] through [7], this argument would not be an argument against pain as such, but only the special case of pain which never ends.

---

<sup>34</sup> His 7.2 discussion implies that he would rule out both (1) any transition to pain, and (2) any transition *from* pain (to health)—as both would be cases of diachronic heterogeneity and diachronic plurality.

*Thesis:* What-is does not suffer pain;  
οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ·

- [1] For it would not be “all,” were it in pain;  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἴη ἀλγέον·
- [2] For a thing in pain would not be able to always be;  
οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναίτο ἀεὶ εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον·
- [3] Nor has it equal power with what is healthy.  
οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ·

I have thus far rendered [1] as claiming that what-is, were it in pain, would not be “all” (*pan*). But “being all” requires interpretation. The *pan* here is typically construed adverbially, i.e., as “completely” or “altogether.”<sup>35</sup> However, an adverbial usage of unarticulated *pan* is not well-attested.<sup>36</sup> Another alternative sometimes employed is to opt for an adjective that renders the clause more explicable than “all” does. A common choice here is “whole.”<sup>37</sup> However, Melissus could have said *oulon* if he had meant “whole” (cf. Parmenides, B8.38). It is worth pursuing whether there are any other, more plausible options.

---

<sup>35</sup> Both Barnes (1982, 217, 195) and Merrill (1998, 394) take this route. On the basis of a difficult claim at the end of B2 that “it is not accomplishable that what is not all, is always” (οὐ γὰρ ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνυστόν, ὃ τι μὴ πᾶν ἔστι), they take the *pan* temporally, as synonymous with *aei* and *aidion*. There is no temporal sense of bare *pan* listed in LSJ (there is *dia pantos* [sc. *chronou*] only); in other words, this hypothesis commits Melissus to an idiosyncratic usage. I prefer not to interpret B7 in light of B2, because I find the latter case less clear: the usage of *pan* is more strained in B2, and the argument in B2 suffers from serious defects and difficulties (which I must set aside in this paper). Suffice it to say that Melissus’ claim in B2 does seem to commit him to the claim that if what-is is *aei*, then it is *pan* [in some sense]. His reasoning in B7 (in claims [1] and [2]), on the other hand, seems to commit him to the claim that if what-is is *pan* [in some sense], then it is *aei*. Barnes and Merrill suppose that *pan* is being used in the same sense in both passages—i.e., an exclusively temporal sense. The passages then jointly entail the following biconditional: what-is is *aei* iff what-is is *pan* [temporally]. While it may be impossible to save the argument of B2 without supposing that *pan* carries only a temporal sense there, there is no such constraint in B7. Further, as I will illustrate, Melissus twice elsewhere in B7 uses *pan* adjectivally to modify an unnamed subject, and one may read the 7.4 *pan* in the same way.

<sup>36</sup> LSJ lists an adverbial use of the articulated *to pan* (D.III.a), under which heading Herodotus “I.32, etc.” is also given as an instance of adverbial unarticulated *pan*. However, all of the occurrences of *pan* in the vicinity of I.32 can be construed adjectivally. This does not mean that Melissus cannot be using unarticulated *pan* adverbially, but it is worth seeing if a standard (adjectival) construal is workable.

<sup>37</sup> As, e.g., Graham (2010, 473).

Melissus uses *pan* elsewhere in B7 as an adjective to modify an unexpressed subject (e.g., *pan homoion*, “all (of it) alike,” 7.1; *oleitai pan*, “all (of it) will perish,” 7.2), though in those cases we find either a predicate adjective or a verb other than *esti*, which helps to fill out the thought. Here in [1] we find *pan* with *esti* only. Perhaps Melissus is saying that were it in pain “all (of it) would not be” where “be” could be interpreted as predicative, and the predicate supplied from the immediate context, i.e. were what-is in pain, “all (of it) would not be (in pain).” Thus, in addition to the standard reading, which reads the claim as “were what-is in pain, what-is would not be altogether”—where “being altogether” is interpreted in light of the attributes of what-is, i.e., “were what-is in pain, what-is would not be all (of what what-is is)”<sup>38</sup>—we can add our variant reading according to which *pan* is a subject modifier:

*Standard:* Nor is it in pain, for, were it in pain, it would not be altogether (i.e., would not be all [of what what-is is]).

*Variant:* Nor is it in pain, for, were it in pain, all (of it) would not be (in pain).<sup>39</sup>

In addition, there does seem to be another way to read the sentence: take the protasis as suppressed,<sup>40</sup> and construe the participle *algeon* as predicate adjective, *pan* as subject modifier, and *eiē* as copula:

*Alternative:* Nor is it in pain, for <if it were,> all (of it) would not be in pain.

Even in English we can suppress the protasis and still understand the sentence: “Nor is it in pain, for all of it would not be in pain.” This *Alternative* reading yields the same sense

<sup>38</sup> My phrase “all (of what what-is is)” can be restricted in various ways. As I discuss in note 35, Barnes and Merrill both restrict it to the temporal dimension: “all (of what what-is temporally is)”

<sup>39</sup> If we read the *eiē* as existential, we get a different reading of *Variant*: “were it in pain, all (of it) would not exist,” which could be construed along the same lines as *Standard* (i.e., some temporal or spatial part of what-is would not exist).

<sup>40</sup> See Smyth (1956, §2349).



as the *Variant* reading: Melissus in both cases is claiming that what-is cannot be in pain because if it were in pain, all of it would not be in pain.

We can now turn to claim [2]: since it is offered in support of [1], perhaps it can help us decide between our two possible senses of [1].<sup>41</sup> There is only one way to interpret [2]:<sup>42</sup> “For a thing in pain would not be able to be (what it is, i.e., in pain) forever.” If we render the *einai* as “exist” the sense remains the same: “For a pained thing would not be able to exist (i.e., as such) forever.” So, claim [2] can be nothing other than the claim that a thing in pain could not continue in pain forever. Why does Melissus think this?

To read his argument sympathetically, we must not arbitrarily restrict our conception of *algein*. As I have already pointed out, Melissus may have sickness in mind as much as pain. And there is some intuitive appeal to the thought that a sick thing cannot live forever, since sickness is at times terminal in all varieties of plants and animals, and even when it is not terminal, it tends to hinder normal biological processes and the life-activities that they make possible. But suppose Melissus has pain as such in mind. If he does, we must still be careful not to arbitrarily restrict pain to the sensation of pain.<sup>43</sup> Pain experience typically<sup>44</sup> involves two “aspects”: some sensation or feeling, and some tissue

---

<sup>41</sup> Strictly, there are two sense-types. As I have already noted (see notes 35 and 38), there are specific ways of qualifying the *Standard* reading, and this is also possible with the *Variant* reading, where “all (of it)” could still be restricted, e.g., spatially or temporally.

<sup>42</sup> If *aei* could be taken as “at every moment of its existence,” then we get two other possibilities: (1) a pained thing would not be able to be (what it is, i.e., in pain) at every point in its existence, and (2) a pained thing would not be able to exist at every point in its existence. The latter is incoherent and can be disregarded. The former is false: surely there have been unfortunate creatures whose lives (so long as they lasted) were never free from sickness or pain. Moreover, Melissus elsewhere uses *aei* in a sense which can—by combining “always was” (*aei ēn*) and “always will be” (*aei estai*)—yield the attribute “eternal” (*aidion*) (cf. B, B2, and 7.1). Thus, the current proposal (to take the *aei* in [2] as “at every moment of its existence”) also contrasts with Melissus’ usage elsewhere.

<sup>43</sup> But cf. Diels-Kranz’s “Schmerzempfindung” and “Leidempfindung” (p. 272).

<sup>44</sup> We need the “typically” qualification since there are well-known cases in which one or the other of the felt or tissue damage “components” is missing (e.g., phantom-limb; opiate patients).

damage or physical disturbance.<sup>45</sup> Since the latter is typically involved, it is plausible to think that being in pain is typically (among other things) a degenerative, disabling or disruptive condition. As such, for something to be in pain is for something to be in a condition which, among other things (i.e., having a distinctive qualitative character), tends toward the dissolution of that thing. Typically, the greater the temporal duration of the pain sensation, the greater the associated degenerative effect. So, Melissus' claim [2] is not based upon unreasonable observations: all observed pained things are mortal (temporally finite), and all observed pains are such that the longer the pain (all other things being equal) the worse (more destructive) its effect upon the organism.<sup>46</sup>

Now that we have settled on an interpretation of claim [2], perhaps this can help us settle on an interpretation of claim [1]. Does [2] do a better job supporting one rather than the other of the two possible senses of [1]? The options for [1] were:

*Standard:* Nor is it in pain, for, were it in pain, it would not be all (i.e., would not be all [of what what-is is]).

*Alternative:* Nor is it in pain, for <if it were,> all (of it) would not be in pain.<sup>47</sup>

The *Alternative* option claims that if what-is were in pain, then only part of it would be in pain. If we allow for both spatial and temporal parts,<sup>48</sup> then the claim could be supported by showing why some temporal part of it could not be in pain, or why some spatial part

---

<sup>45</sup> Again, as noted above (page 2 and note 4), Melissus' *algein* and *aniasthai* could themselves be designed to refer to these two aspects (*algein*, the bodily aspect; *aniasthai*, the felt aspect).

<sup>46</sup> Even so, the claim which these observations underwrite (i.e., claim [2]) is a claim involving eternity. As such, this method of justifying it is not perfectly compelling: it amounts to extrapolating facts about eternal (temporally unbounded) things from data limited to mortal (temporally bounded) things.

<sup>47</sup> Or, if one prefers to avoid supposing a suppressed protasis, substitute the synonymous *Variant*: "Nor is it in pain, for were it in pain, all (of it) would not be (in pain)."

<sup>48</sup> One precedent for interpreting *pan* as referring to all spatial and temporal parts is the *homoion pan* of 7.1. It is not uncommon to say that "all" (*pan*) of something is "alike" (*homoion*) or is "similarly" (*homoiōs*) *F*, to indicate that all of its physical components or spatial parts are alike or similarly *F*. Herodotus, for instance, describes a shield as "all similarly gold" (χρύσειον πᾶν ὁμοίως, I.52), where the point is clearly to emphasize that there is no non-gold component of the shield, i.e., "all of it" is gold. (Cf. also Anaxagoras B12, claiming that *nous* is *pas homoios*, wherever it occurs.) This much suggests that Melissus intends *homoion pan* to cover spatial parts. That he also intends it to cover temporal parts is shown in 7.2, where he claims that *diachronic* heterogeneity entails not being *homoion*.

of it could not be in pain. Claim [2] seems to offer a reason why some temporal part of it could not be in pain: a pained thing could not exist (as such) forever. Thus, if what-is were in pain, some temporal part of it would not be in pain, insofar as all pained things are temporally finite, whereas (as we know from 7.1 and B1–3) what-is is temporally infinite.

If we take the *Standard* reading of claim [1], we can adopt a similar sense for “being all (of what what-is is)”: being (spatially and temporally) all (that what-is is). If so, then [1] would be claiming that its being in pain would prevent it from being spatially and temporally infinite. Again, there would be two ways to support such a claim: either show why something in pain cannot be spatially infinite, or show why something in pain cannot be temporally infinite. Claim [2], as I have already argued, asserts that no pained thing can be temporally infinite.

So, under either reading of claim [1], we can see how claim [2] can support it. The *Standard* reading has Melissus arguing that what-is cannot be in pain because this is inconsistent with what-is being “all” that it is, i.e., taking up all of space and time. The *Alternative* reading has Melissus claiming that if what-is were in pain, all of it could not be in pain. Why should we think that this is a problem for what-is? It is a problem because Melissus had also claimed in 7.1 that what-is is “all alike” (*homoion pan*). Given claim [2]’s point that all pained things are temporally finite, we must suppose that if what-is is in pain, it is either temporally finite itself, or only in pain for part of its existence. But what-is is not temporally finite, which rules out the first disjunct. And what-is cannot have a feature for only part of its existence (since it cannot be diachronically heterogeneous), which rules out the second disjunct. Thus, while either reading of claim [1] is workable, there may be some reason to prefer the *Standard* reading, since it requires positing fewer missing premises.

## TWO OPTIONS FOR CLAIM [3]

We must now ask what role claim [3] is meant to play. We have seen that either reading of [1] is workable, and that in both cases [2] (perhaps in tandem with earlier claims made in B7) is sufficient to establish [1]. However, since we have read the *pan* in [1] as referring to both spatial and temporal infinity, and given that [2] is focused on temporal infinity, could it be that Melissus is showing in [3] how being in pain is also inconsistent with being spatially infinite?

In context, claim [3] is as follows:

Nor is it in pain, for were it in pain, it would not be all (of what it is), for a thing in pain would not be able to exist for ever, [3] nor has it equal power with what is healthy.

οὐδὲ ἀλγεῖ· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πᾶν εἴη ἀλγέον· οὐ γὰρ ἂν δύναιτο ἀεὶ εἶναι χρῆμα ἀλγέον·  
[3] οὐδὲ ἔχει ἴσην δύναμιν τῷ ὑγιεῖ·

As was already noted, the antecedent of the “it” in [3] is the expressed subject of [2], i.e., *chrēma algeon*. Melissus is thus claiming, “Nor does a thing in pain have equal power with what is healthy.” It is not clear what Melissus has in mind by “power” (*dunamis*), though it is regarded (according to the hypothesis) as something which can be “had” by a pained thing and by something healthy or sound. There is no way to construe this as a claim about spatial finitude, however: For why suppose that a thing in sound condition is spatially infinite? Thus, Melissus cannot be offering a spatial alternative to the temporal approach given in [2].

One thing to note regarding the *dunamis* in [3] is its proximity to a related verb, *dunaito*, in [2]. In [2], Melissus had claimed that a pained thing “would not be able” (*ou...an dunaito*) to exist forever. Perhaps in [3] he is offering an account of that inability. The account points out that a thing in pain does not have “equal ability” (*isēn dunamin*) with what is healthy. The “inequality” he has in mind must be regarded as a

specific case: a pained thing has *less* ability than a healthy thing. If this is what he means, his manner of expressing it is not straightforward. Moreover, it is plausible only if the comparisons are made within a class, since, e.g., a sick terrier might still have “more ability” than a healthy dandelion.

Claim [3], according to the present interpretation, also requires—if it is to effectively communicate its point—that Melissus’ reader assumes that healthy or sound things are the only things with any hope of going on forever. This may be plausible, but it is not liable to convince someone who is already inclined to resist [2]. Claim [2]—the claim that a pained thing could not go on forever—is no more disputable than the conjunction of the following claims (which the current reading of [3] involves): that only a healthy or sound thing has a hope of going on forever; that no pained thing has equal power with a healthy thing; and that the only way a pained thing could fail to have equal power with a healthy thing is to have less power than it. Why think that anyone skeptical of [2] would accept all three of those claims? Finally, one other weakness with this reading is that though it regards [3] as supporting [2], we do not get a *gar* in [3], but only the bare connective *oude*.

Barnes suggests an intriguing alternative account of [3], according to which Melissus’ reference to an equal *dunamis* is not, as in the former suggestion, merely a roundabout way of saying that unlike a healthy thing which might go on forever, a pained thing could not. Instead, this interpretation shows Melissus, as elsewhere in the pain passage, thoroughly versed in the physiological theories of the day. Barnes suggests that

Conceivably, [3] argues against the suggestion that [what-is] is both in pain and healthy, all the time, but in different parts of itself. Pain and health, Melissus avers, could not coexist in harmonious equilibrium as that suggestion requires; physiology, again must be in the offing.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Barnes (1982, 217).

If we adopt the *Standard* reading of claim [1], Melissus is claiming that were what-is in pain, what-is would not be all (of what it is). The specific way that what-is would fail to be all of what it is, is by failing to be temporally unbounded. Melissus bases this claim on the general claim that a pained thing would not be able to exist forever. But a pluralist opponent may balk at this claim: as a general claim it is surely quite false—indeed, they would offer a counter-example. An eternal state of affairs can be conceived in which equal-but-opposing *dunameis* keep one another in check, with neither gaining supremacy. Now suppose that we have such a state of affairs, and specify that the equal but opposing *dunameis* are the *dunameis* of a healthy thing and a sick thing. To say that such things have *dunameis* is just to say that they have a specific collection of capacities, perhaps for acting and being acted upon in a certain range of ways.

Thus, the suggestion being considered has Melissus, in [3], responding to such an objection (which was an objection to his entirely general claim [2]). In short, Melissus' response is to deny flatly the possibility that pain and health could ever coexist in a stable and equal arrangement. But is it plausible even to think that one of Melissus' contemporaries would have been inclined to pose an objection like this?

## ALCMAEON AND EMPEDOCLES

Equality of powers plays an important part in the physiological theories of the mid-fifth century. It is likely that Alcmaeon's theory of health was first developed in the early fifth-century and was widely influential.<sup>50</sup> Alcmaeon's theory is preserved for us as follows:

Health (ὑγείας) is the equality of rights (ἰσονομίαν) of the powers (τῶν δυνάμεων), wet–dry, cold–hot, bitter–sweet and the rest; but single rule (μοναρχίαν) among them causes disease (νόσου); the single rule of either pair is

---

<sup>50</sup> On the dating of Alcmaeon, see Longrigg (1993, 51ff); Huffman (2008); and Guthrie (1965a, 341–59).

deleterious. Disease occurs sometimes from an internal cause such as excess of heat or cold, sometimes from an external cause such as excess or deficiency of food, sometimes in a certain part, such as blood, marrow or brain; but these parts also are sometimes affected by external causes, such as certain waters or a particular site or fatigue or constraint or similar reasons. But health is the harmonious mixture of the qualities (τὴν δὲ ὑγίαν τὴν σύμμετρον τῶν ποιῶν κρᾶσιν).<sup>51</sup>

While we cannot be sure how much of this “fragment” is the actual wording used by Alcmaeon, the portions pertinent to our comparison are probably Alcmaeonian.<sup>52</sup> Note the importance of the following concepts, which also all occur in [3]: health (*hugieia*), equality (here in archaic, political guise as *isonomia*<sup>53</sup>), and powers (*dunameis*). Melissus would have been familiar with Alcmaeon’s theory, or something like it.<sup>54</sup>

In Alcmaeon’s theory, health results when opposing *dunameis* are in a state of equilibrium (*isonomia*). Melissus, on the other hand, is claiming that the *dunamis* of a healthy thing is not equal to—and thus does not coexist in a stable state of equality with—the *dunamis* of a sick thing. It may be that he is drawing attention to the fact that health itself can be considered as having a contrary. Health and its contrary, however, unlike the familiar contraries hot–cold, wet–dry, sweet–bitter (contraries with which Melissus shows himself familiar in B8), resist entering into a harmonious state: experience teaches us that a sick organism either succumbs to its illness or recovers its health—one of the two contraries always wins out. Thus, it is implausible to appeal to the doctrine of equal-but-opposing *dunameis* in order to resist Melissus’ claim that nothing sick or in pain can go on forever. And if Melissus is indeed alluding to Alcmaeonian

---

<sup>51</sup> DK24B4. Slightly modified version of Freeman’s (1948: 40–1) translation.

<sup>52</sup> See Guthrie (1965a, 345–6) for a discussion.

<sup>53</sup> Guthrie (1965a, 345–6) points out the archaic quality of the political metaphors, and sees it as proof of an early date for Alcmaeon.

<sup>54</sup> See Longrigg (1993, 47–103) for an account of the cross-pollination of medical and philosophical theories during this period.

theory, it is appropriate to render the *isēn dunamin* in quotes, to suggest that Melissus is referring to a technical term of his opponent:

Nor is it sick, for were it sick, it would not be all, for a sick thing would not have the power to exist forever—nor has it “equal power” with what is healthy.

Scholars have often supposed that Melissus, in the pain passage, must be responding to another philosopher. Many suggestions have been aired, among them: Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and Diogenes.<sup>55</sup> If the line of interpretation we have been exploring here is correct, then we can add Alcmaeon to the list of candidates. However, the considerations which have led us to Alcmaeon also favor Empedocles.

“Empedocles,” as Vlastos remarks, “builds a universe to the specifications of Alcmaeon’s formula of health....”<sup>56</sup> It is a fundamental tenet of Empedocles’ system that his four roots (as well as his two motive-desiderative forces) are “all equal” (*isa panta*, B17). It is not clear what type of equality Empedocles has in mind. Aristotle puzzles over whether Empedocles is claiming in B17 that the roots are equal in quantity or in power (*De Gen. et Corr.*, 333a19–34).<sup>57</sup> Empedocles is, however, clear that all of the roots are of equal age (i.e., eternal). He also speaks of each root as having a peculiar “honor” or “office” (*timē*) as well as a peculiar “character” (*ēthos*) (B17.27–8), which suggests that he would probably regard each as having a specific set of *dunameis*: e.g., fire, the *dunameis* hot and bright; water, the *dunameis* cold and dark (B21.3–5). And we can imagine Empedocles, were he in a dialectical context, conceiving that—just as Strife goes on forever in balanced opposition with Love—so the *dunamis* (or *dunameis*) of the sick

---

<sup>55</sup> Heraclitus by Burnet (1908, 376); Empedocles by Longrigg (1985, 113n44); Anaxagoras by Burnet (1930, 326); and Diogenes by Diller (1941, 366). Graham (2010, 482) also suggests Anaxagoras and Diogenes.

<sup>56</sup> Vlastos (1947, 62).

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.* Cf. Wright (1981, 22 and 35n79).



or the pained might well go on for ever in balance with the equal-but-opposing *dunamis* (or *dunameis*) of the healthy.

Moreover, Empedocles, like Melissus, is interested in grief or psychological pain as it relates to what is real and eternal:

For from these [i.e., the four roots and two motive-desiderative forces] (*ek toutōn*) have all things been fittingly conjoined, and by these (*toutois*) do creatures think and have delight (*hēdont'*) and suffer grief (*aniōntai*).<sup>58</sup>

And like Melissus, Empedocles—a self-styled “physician” (*iatros*, B146)—is interested in the connections between what is real and what is healthy (see B98, B105, A86). Unlike Melissus, however, Empedocles boldly promises his followers a “word of healing for all kinds of illnesses,” and relief to those who have been “long pierced by harsh pains” (B112).<sup>59</sup> Thus, while Empedocles the therapist offers escape from these symptoms of Strife,<sup>60</sup> Empedocles the metaphysician posits Strife as an *ineliminable* feature of fundamental reality. Melissus, always the sober metaphysician, offers only what solace may be gleaned from the insight that sickness and pain are not features of “what really exists” (τοῦ...έόντος ἀληθινοῦ, B8.5). Sickness and pain, according to Melissus, can and must be *eliminated* from any characterization of *to eon* that seeks to be true.<sup>61</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> B107 = Theophrastus, *De Sensibus* 10. Translation by Stratton (1917, 75). Regarding the four roots and two forces as the antecedent of *toutōn* and *toutois*, see Wolfsdorf (2009, 63).

<sup>59</sup> Translation by Wright (1981, 264).

<sup>60</sup> On the causal role of Strife in pain and suffering, see Wolfsdorff (2009, 61–2). Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 226–7, where “tearful Pains” (Ἄλγεα δακρυόεντα) and “painful Toil” (Πόνον ἀλγινόνεντα) are among the offspring of Ἔρις.

<sup>61</sup> That is, any true account will refrain from claiming that sickness or pain is a feature of *to eon*—which is compatible with asserting positively (as Melissus does) that *to eon* does not suffer sickness or pain. Melissus is not interested in eliminating pain *concepts* from our accounts of *to eon*; he is interested in demonstrating that there is nothing in the extension of such concepts (i.e., he is interested in eliminating pain itself from our ontology). A demonstration of this sort will have to employ pain concepts.

## CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Melissus offers three arguments against the hypothesis that what-is suffers pain. One attempts to rule out any instance of sickness or pain at any time  $t$ . It was based on an empirical generalization. Another argument attempts to rule out any transition into a pained state. It was seen to be founded on the earliest move in Melissus' deduction, the denial of coming-to-be in B1. A third argument attempts to rule out pain insofar as only temporally bounded entities can suffer pain. Two interpretations of this argument were offered. According to the first interpretation, what-is cannot suffer pain because what-is is not temporally bounded (and all pained things are). According to the second interpretation, what-is cannot suffer pain because all temporal parts of what-is could not be in pain (which is problematic because this entails diachronic heterogeneity). I have suggested that the first interpretation is preferred because it is more direct.

Additionally, I have offered two accounts of the problematic claim [3]. The first of these accounts is minimalist but somewhat unsatisfying, because it characterizes Melissus as ineffective in expressing his meaning and unsuccessful in convincing a skeptical reader. An alternate account of [3], admittedly more speculative, has the virtue of showing Melissus to be an astute dialectician, as well as suggesting an answer to the riddle about which philosopher he may be responding to in the pain passage.

Finally, I hope to have clarified the import of Melissus' claim in 7.2 that if what-is were to suffer any of the attributes listed—among which, pain or sickness and grief—it would no longer be one (in virtue of its being diachronically heterogeneous and thus diachronically plural). While Melissus nowhere explicitly claims that what-is cannot

suffer pain or grief because it is one, his claims in 7.2 taken together with certain of his claims in 7.4–6 commit him to thinking just this.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup> Thus the author of *De Nat. Hom.* is not far off the mark when, alluding to Melissus' argument against pain, he claims that "if man were one, he would never feel pain" (εἰ ἐν ἧν ὁ ἄνθρωπος, οὐδέποτε ἂν ἤλγεεν, 2.10).

## References

- Barnes, J. 1982. *The Presocratic Philosophers*. Revised ed. 2 vols. in one. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Burnet, J. 1908. *Early Greek Philosophy*. 2nd ed. London: Adam & Charles Black.
- . 1930. *Early Greek Philosophy*. 4th ed. London: Adam & Charles Black.
- Chantraine, P. 1984. *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Denniston, J. D. 1950. *The Greek Particles*. 2nd ed. Revised by K. J. Dover. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett.
- Diels-Kranz = Diels, H., and W. Kranz, eds. 1951–52. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. 6th ed. 3 vols. Berlin: Weidmann.
- Diller, H. 1941. “Die Philosophiegeschichtliche Stellung des Diogenes von Apollonia.” *Hermes* 76 (4): 359–81.
- Freeman, K. 1948. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Graham, D. W. 2010. *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Guthrie, W. K. C. 1965a. *A History of Greek Philosophy. Volume 1: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1965b. *A History of Greek Philosophy. Volume 2: The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Huffman, C. 2008. “Alcmaeon.” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edited by E. Zalta. URL=<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/alcmaeon/>>.
- Longrigg, J. 1985. “Elements and After: A Study in the Presocratic Physics of the Second Half of the Fifth Century.” *Apeiron* 19:93–115.
- . 1993. *Greek Rational Medicine: Philosophy and Medicine from Alcmaeon to the Alexandrians*. London: Routledge.

- Merrill, B. L. 1998. "Melissus of Samos : A Commentary on the Sources and Fragments." Ph. D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin.
- Reale, G. 1970. *Melisso: Testimonianze e frammenti*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Smyth, H. W. 1956. *Greek Grammar*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Solmsen, F. 1969. "The 'Eleatic One' in Melissus." *Mededelingen der koninklijke nederlandse akademie van wetenschappen*, n.s., 32 (8): 221–33. Reprinted in vol. 3 of Solmsen 1982, 137–49.
- . 1982. *Kleine Schriften*. 3 vols. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag.
- Stratton, G. M. 1917. *Theophrastus and the Greek Physiological Psychology Before Aristotle*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Vitali, R. 1973. *Melisso di Samo sul mondo o sull'essere: Una interpretazione dell'eleatismo*. Urbino: Argalia editore.
- Vlastos, G. 1947. "Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies." *Classical Philology* 42 (3): 156–178. Reprinted in vol. 1 of Vlastos 1993, 57–88.
- . 1993. *Studies in Greek Philosophy*. 2 vols. *Volume I: The Presocratics. Volume II: Socrates, Plato, and Their Tradition*. Edited by D. W. Graham. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Wolfsdorff, D. 2009. "Empedocles and His Ancient Readers on Desire and Pleasure." *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 36:1–71.
- Wright, M.R. 1981. *Empedocles: The Extant Fragments*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

## **Vita**

Ivan Heyman was born in Norwalk, OH in 1981. He graduated from Norwalk High School in 1999. He studied philosophy and theology for two years at Grove City College in Grove City, PA, after which he enlisted in the US Air Force and served as a Hebrew linguist from 2002 to 2006. While in the service, Ivan married Melissa Kreutner, whom he had met during his time at Grove City College. After completing his enlistment, Ivan and Melissa relocated to Seattle, WA. There Ivan resumed his work in philosophy at The University of Washington, where he received his B.A. in 2008. He and Melissa then moved to Austin, TX, where he began graduate work in philosophy at The University of Texas at Austin.

Permanent address: 3803 Tarragona Lane  
Austin, TX 78727

This report was typed by the author.